

The U.S. in Vietnam

1954-1973



Vietnam



Asia

1954 - With Soviet aid, nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh led the Vietnamese to fight for independence from France

The resulting Geneva Accords agreement split Vietnam. In the North, Minh's Communist Party ruled. In the South, the US backed President Diem.

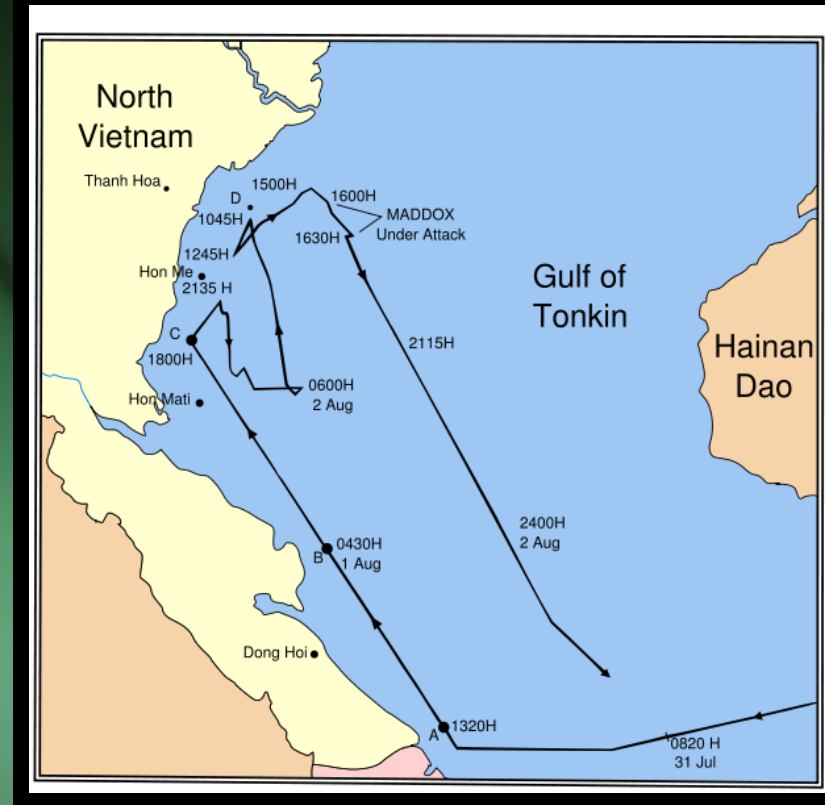


1956 - Diem refused to hold an election and became unpopular among many South Vietnamese, who joined Minh's Vietminh army and were called Vietcong.

Fearing the spread of communism throughout Vietnam, Eisenhower & Kennedy sent military "advisers" and aid to South Vietnam.



President Johnson inherited the Vietnam conflict after Kennedy's assassination in 1963



Gulf of Tonkin Resolution 1964

When US ships in the Gulf of Tonkin reported an attack by the North Vietnamese, Johnson asked Congress for the power to send US forces without declaring war. Congress complied and handed that power over to the president. Evidence of the attack would later come into question.



Planning a quick and easy defeat of the communist Vietcong in South Vietnam, the Johnson administration began **Operation Rolling Thunder**. The US military hoped to rapidly bomb the enemy into submission.

When the bombing campaign failed to wipe out the communist fighters in South Vietnam, Defense Secretary McNamara and General Westmoreland convinced Johnson that the war should be “Americanized.” Their strategy was to put American forces on the ground to “search and destroy” the groups of Vietcong hidden in the jungle.



McNamara and Westmoreland



The Vietnamese Jungle

When a victory of the most advanced military in the world over the low-tech guerrilla fighters in Vietnam did not happen swiftly, U.S. tactics became more desperate, resulting in rising civilian deaths and long-term consequences.



Agent Orange - poisonous herbicide used to kill jungle growth.



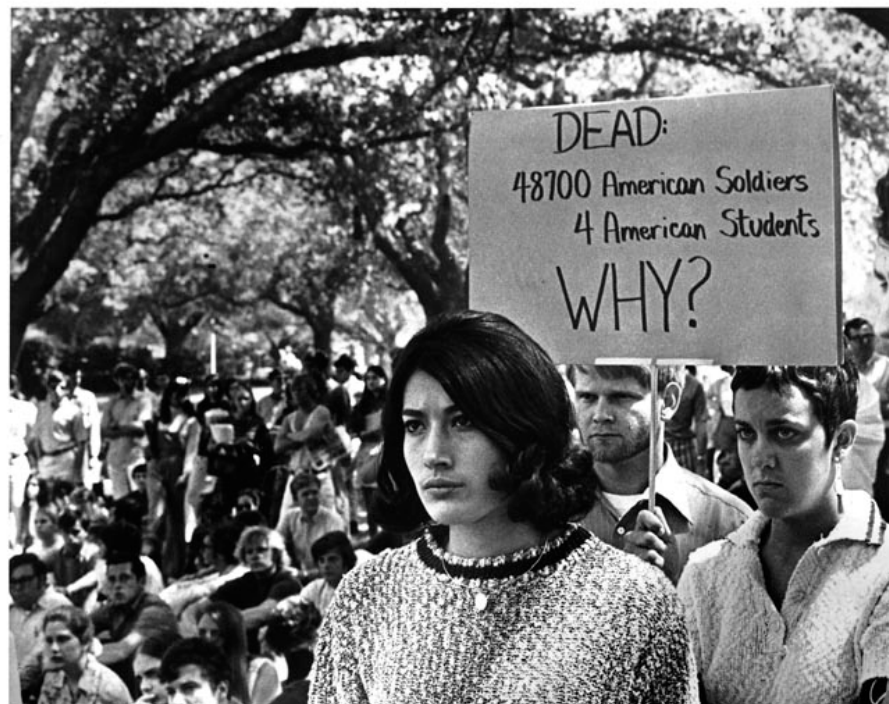
Napalm - sticky gasoline mixture used in bombs & flame throwers. The rise in civilian suffering led to increased anti-Americanism and support for the Vietcong



Antiwar Movement Rises

- Media showed a “credibility gap” between Johnson’s claims and the reality in Vietnam
- Vietnam should handle its own affairs
- Vietnam is tiny, poor & far away
- Pacifism (anitwar in general)
- Money should be spent at home
- Possibility of nuclear war
- Wanted loved ones to come home
- Black men fighting in Vietnam but facing discrimination at home





Tet Offensive

In 1968, Vietminh/Vietcong armies launched a surprise attack on several key sites in South Vietnam. The Communists were not successful in holding their positions, but their coordination stunned many Americans. More observers began to question whether the war could be won.





1968

President Johnson steps down
Martin Luther King assassinated
Robert Kennedy assassinated
Violent protests and riots
Nixon (Rep.) elected president

My Lai Massacre

In their search for Communist guerrilla fighters, US troops massacred 300 civilians in the village of My Lai. For the atrocities committed, the military charged the commanding officer with murder. Reports began to question the leadership, discipline, and morale among the troops in general.





Kent State University, 1970

At a student protest of the war, National Guardsmen opened fire, killing four and wounded eight student demonstrators.



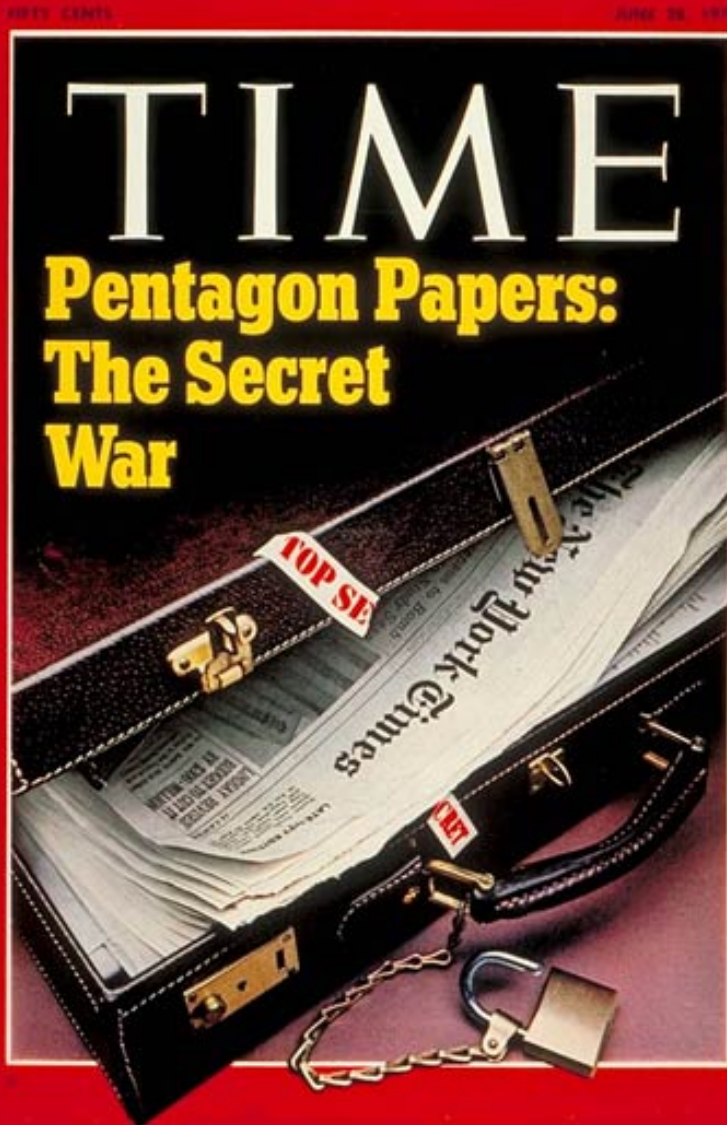
Nixon's secret bombings - For fourteen months, without the knowledge of Congress or the public, Nixon expanded the war by bombing enemy supply lines in the neighboring country of Cambodia. In public, Nixon supported “Vietnamization” of the war to shift the burden of fighting back to the South Vietnamese.

Pentagon Papers

Classified government documents were leaked to the press, revealing long-term lies and deception from the White House and US military about policies in Vietnam.

Nixon tried to block publication of the documents in *The New York Times*, but the Supreme Court ruled against the White House.

The study was published, causing the credibility gap to seem even wider.





War Powers Act

Legislation passed declaring that in the future, a president could only commit troops to a foreign war for 60 days before seeking Congressional approval.

Paris Peace Accords

In Paris, Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, met with North Vietnam to negotiate a peace settlement. Both sides would lay down their arms. US troops would withdraw. The US would contribute toward reconstructing Vietnam. POWs would be sent home.





Fall of Saigon - South Vietnamese capital fell to North Vietnamese troops as the last remaining Americans evacuate the embassy.